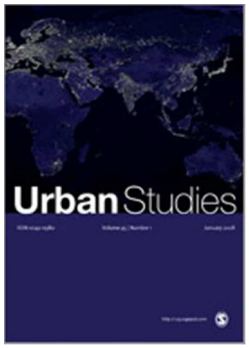

Chronic Urban Trauma and the Slow Violence of Housing Dispossession

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Chronic Urban Trauma: the Slow Violence of Housing Dispossession

Abstract

This paper sets the idea of slow violence into dialogue with trauma, to understand the practice and legitimization of the repeated damage done to certain places through state violence. Slow violence (Nixon 2011) describes the 'attritional lethality' of many contemporary effects of globalization. While originating in environmental humanities, it has clear relevance for urban studies. After assessing accounts of the post-traumatic city, the paper draws insights from feminist psychiatry and postcolonial analysis to develop the concept of chronic urban trauma, as a psychological effect of violence involving an ongoing relational dynamic. Reporting from a three-year participatory action research project on the managed decline and disposal of social housing in a former coalmining village in North East England, the paper discusses the temporal and place-based effects of slow violence. It argues that chronic urban trauma becomes hard-wired in place, enabling retraumatisation while also remaining open to efforts to heal and rebuild.

Keywords

Class, Community, Displacement, Gentrification, Housing, Inequality, Violence, Trauma

"The Numbered Streets"

Be there for me
they told us tales as tall as trees
Be there for me
the breaking day is breaking me
me rent is paid, me head is laid upon the block
of damp and cold and numbered housing stock

Be there for me
for I am all alone and cold
In hungry streets
the rats all live on 9 days old
And if at school they say that I'm a fool
It's just the price you pay for living poor

Look out to sea
I wish that I was out there free
Far away
from Horden's prison colliery
They said they'd mend and make the houses dry
But politicians hate the miner's cry

Be there for me
They say in accent loud and clear
that money is to make
And not for buying beer
It's not for us but just the chosen few
They bite the given hand that much is true

Be there for me
I cannot feel the stars tonight
That glimmer in the sky
above the dimming light

Me dreams are boarded up, the people's hands are tied
They will not let us live and love has died

Be there for me
The walls are going higher now
They're not for me to try
And I can't show you how
The day has come and gone before we speak
There is no mercy for the poor and weak

Be there for me
they tell us tales as tall as trees
Be there for me
the breaking day is breaking me
me rent is paid, me head is down and I don't sleep
behind the blinds in Horden's Numbered Streets

Introduction

Slow violence and the city

This paper interrogates the connections between the slow violence of historical events and current day processes of urban dispossession. In particular, following Nixon's assertion that 'attritional catastrophes...are marked above all by *displacements*' (2011: 7, my emphasis), it examines the linkages between managed industrial decline and contemporary housing dispossession under neoliberalism and austerity. Building on Till's (2012) and Shields' (2012) overtures to 'urban trauma', and after evaluating accounts of the post-traumatic city (Lahoud et al 2010), it formulates the concept of chronic urban trauma, which speaks to the subvisible temporalities and spatialities of slow violence. The research was conducted in collaboration and solidarity with local activists and artists, as recently advocated by critics of urban political economy approaches (Kern and McLean 2017). While feminist perspectives have long focused on everyday emotional experiences in/of the city, there has been relatively little exploration of the psychoanalytical dimensions *of* urban processes (Bondi 1998).

Informed by the empirical study and wider feminist and postcolonial analyses, it is argued here that chronic urban trauma can be seen not only as the result of historical/contemporary violence but as essential to sustaining both; it helps to understand how further forms of fast and slow violence continue to be practiced and legitimated in particular locales.

The case study is a village of just over 3,000 inhabitants on the former East Durham coalfield in North East England, the setting for the folk song reprinted above, one of a collection that arose from the research collaboration (see Heslop et al forthcoming). County Durham saw massive in-migration from 1801-1901 to service 200 coalmines sunk that century. New villages were built around the pits to house miners and their families. By the 1930s, Horden Colliery was the largest producing coalmine in Britain. Following long national strikes and bitter controversy, it closed in 1987, part of an industrial termination that 'represents the most dramatic contemporary example of social transformation in Britain since the Second World War' and led to geographically concentrated severe social, economic and emotional harm (Bennett et al 1991:1).

Horden is now part of the built up area of the town of Peterlee, situated between Sunderland and Hartlepool. While having the characteristics of an urban area, it is far-removed from the places that are typically the subject of analysis of housing dispossession; like most of Durham's mining villages, Horden is located on the post-industrial rural-urban fringe, is almost exclusively white and working class, and is in little danger of gentrification. In Horden, the coalmine closure has replayed in the slow managed decline of ex-miners' social housing and, as a coda to recent government housing policy, a moment of fast violence in 2015-16 when this housing was sold at auction. The twin concepts of slow violence and chronic urban trauma described in this paper help to understand the processes taking place in this village over the last three decades, and those in similar contexts.

Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence 'occurs gradually and out of sight, [it is] a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all' (Nixon 2011: 2). Encompassing the gradual unfolding of many contemporary effects of globalization, it builds on Galtung's (1969) structural violence, introducing the importance of time and the growing tendency for only spectacular violence to be made visible. Nixon's focus is environmental destruction under capitalism; the

very slow or delayed repercussions of climate change, pollution and warfare decades later. A number of examples in his book relate to the geographical outsourcing of harmful industries and pollution to poorer places that typifies globalization. Hence slow violence is spatially disproportionate and compounds uneven development, as people, places and ecosystems already made vulnerable become the targets of further destructive effects of capitalism. Central to the argument is that slow violence is often invisible, yet the scale of its brutality towards humanity is as great or greater than sudden and spectacular events such as natural hazards. This invisibility is both a manifestation of capitalism and in capitalism's interest, being difficult to identify and mobilize against. Nixon draws on postcolonial writer-activists to provide a concept and language for environmental justice, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist movements, in order to overcome barriers to representing this form of violence.

While Nixon's work sits in the field of environmental humanities, slow violence has clear though largely unexplored relevance for urban studies. The idea has been applied to processes of gentrification in cities of the global North (e.g. Cahill et al 2016; Kern 2016); here too, 'ordinary' and ongoing processes of colonial and racial capitalism take shape in structural violence, not as one-off spectacular events but as continual, incremental discriminatory dispossessions of communities and places. Caitlin Cahill and youth co-researchers in Bushwick, New York City, a neighbourhood previously abandoned by the state and private capital, use slow violence to explain their struggle with 'broken windows' policing, itself symptomatic of continual, unchecked discriminatory action against black and low income youth (Cahill et al 2016). Leslie Kern's (2016: 453) analysis of a gentrifying post-industrial neighbourhood in Toronto examines how slow violence has quietly enabled the 'temporal displacement of certain people and activities' (Kern 2016: 442).

Trauma is absent from Nixon's analysis, and this paper questions its relation to slow violence. Trauma, as the term is used in this paper, is distinct from the immediate or long term physical damage of violence. It is a psychological effect of violence that may have distinct impacts a long way down the line, but may also underpin an ongoing relational dynamic between abuser and abused (Hennessy 2011; Stark 2007). What forms of trauma follow or interweave slow violence? Of course, the 'abuser' in slow violence constitutes a diffuse set of processes rather than one individual, but the paper draws out the similarities in traumatic dynamics. In seeking to understand the repetition of slow violence in particular urban sites – the ways in which it appears to become encoded in the material, ecological and

social fabric of certain places – I suggest that dialogue with literatures on other forms of trauma are productive. In particular, my interest is not so much on the effects of urban dispossession on individual bodies and minds but on collective spatial trauma (Pain, forthcoming) and chronic trauma, which present similar abusive dynamics at different scales (e.g. Pain 2015; Raynor 2016). In the next section, I consider insights from feminist psychiatry, postcolonial and indigenous scholarship to lay the foundations for the idea of chronic urban trauma. I then review existing approaches to the 'post-traumatic city' with these in mind, before developing my reading of chronic urban trauma through the analysis of housing dispossession in the second half of the paper.

Chronic trauma

In feminist psychiatrist Judith Herman's powerful work on trauma and recovery, she posited a new form of complex PTSD or 'chronic trauma', 'an insidious, progressive form of PTSD' (Herman 1997: 86). Chronic trauma is associated with forms of gender-based violence, child abuse and political violence that share certain characteristics including repeated exposure to violence, close control by the perpetrator and a limited prospect of escape. These violences may be characterised by the appearance of normality, making them less visible to others. They are particularly likely to involve psychological violence, which becomes a key relational dynamic between abuser and abused, and equally or more productive of ongoing fear and trauma as physical assaults. The effects of chronic trauma commonly include feelings of dehumanization, altered identity, anger, depression, self-hatred and suicidality.

Herman's work posed a robust and influential challenge to the psychiatric profession (Humphreys and Joseph 2004). As well as highlighting and distinguishing trauma arising from long-term violence from that created by one-off incidents, she identified socially marginalised groups as more likely to experience chronic trauma. Her work, alongside that of other feminist and queer theorists, challenges the idea of trauma as constituting a dramatic rupture between past and present, instead exposing its ongoing and everyday nature (Brown 2003; Cvetovich 2003).

Postcolonial and indigenous perspectives on trauma also understand it as a collective condition affect affecting particular communities (e.g. Brave Heart 2002; Fanon 1963; hooks 2003; Schwab 2010). These accounts recognise the scale and reach of the traumatic after-effects of social violence repeated over a longer timeframe, especially slavery, colonialism

and racism. Many writers critique the predominant western trauma theory paradigm that, heavily influenced by Freudian analysis, restricts itself to a model of single-event trauma as rupture from what has gone before, and tends to privilege the suffering of white Europeans while it depoliticises and dehistoricises trauma (Fassin and Rechtman 2009; Visser 2015).

While we should not conflate feminist and postcolonial theories of trauma, and each of these perspectives is diverse, they share some common features that frame the concept of chronic urban trauma that I develop here. They emphasize the close connections between intimate and collective experience; they involve a distinct set of temporalities; and they place social politics as central to causality, experience, treatment and rebuilding. Chronic trauma fits well with the idea of slow violence, which also arises from continuous misuse of structural power and has incremental and cumulative effects in certain settings. Our suggestion in this paper is that chronic trauma describes the psychological damage, alongside the physical harm, that slow violence creates and depends on to be sustained.

Trauma and the city

There are a number of existing perspectives on urban trauma. Here, I identify two recent approaches which are of most interest to this discussion. My evocation of chronic urban trauma differentiates between, firstly, readings of urban trauma that focus primarily on recovery from spectacular events within the city; and secondly, accounts drawing on postcolonial and/or feminist framings of both trauma and the urban.

Firstly, 'urban trauma' has been used to describe systemic disruption created by contemporary mass casualty scenarios in cities (e.g. Allen et al 2016). The framing is of an unpredicted rupture of urban life, whose effects on urban infrastructure and governance last some time. Here the impetus is to understand recovery from trauma as a physical wound rather than a psychological dynamic. Lahoud et al's (2010) collection *Post Traumatic Urbanism* offers a more conceptually sophisticated reading of trauma from the vantage point of architecture and urban systems theory but, I suggest, has some limitations. Their focus is the devastation and prospects for recovery after catastrophic events leading to temporary infrastructure breakdown, such as the 2001 New York terrorist attacks, Hurricane Katrina, financial and energy crises, instances of extreme weather, war and invasion. They argue that such sudden and rapid events with longer term impacts on the city are now commonplace, and the demand placed on urbanism is design with adaptation and resilience at its core.

Lahoud (2010:17), acknowledging that architects are sometimes complicit in trauma, notes caution in bringing the contentious term into dialogue with the urban, as the built environment has no subconscious. Instead, he defines trauma as something new and unpredictable: 'the traumatic moment is unheralded and unprecedented…it arrives unrecognisably and without warning, an inassimilable event that shatters the very coordinates of our experiential landscape'.

This is a different temporality to those of chronic trauma and slow violence. There are occasional hints that traumas on different scales and timeframes are interwoven (Lahoud 2010), most evident in Kairuz's (2010) account of the resonances between different waves of violence in Caracus. And there is no simplistic framing of before and after, indeed for Lahoud (2010:18) trauma 'names that moment after our image of the future is destroyed but before it has been replaced': the future has already arrived before the event. For the most part, however, the working assumption is of relative stability becoming broken through a post-traumatic future, and whilst following Freud there is recognition that trauma is created by an internal/external dialectic (Benjamin 2010), most of *Post-Traumatic Urbanism* focuses on assaults that come from outside the city rather than those that are elemental to its own power-laden and exclusionary machinations. In contrast, writers on cultural trauma from feminist and queer studies (e.g. Cvetovich 2003) begin with affected peoples' own definitions and experiences of trauma; they contend that it is a pervasive condition for minority groups, rather than something that appears when social cohesion is suddenly broken in a way that becomes visible to others. With chronic trauma, we are never post-violence, but both violence and trauma wind on as material, embedded, everyday realities.

More useful is the second approach to urban trauma that uses postcolonial and feminist framings of both trauma and the urban. Till's (2012:6) discussion of wounded cities describes urban places that have been 'structured by particular histories of physical destruction, displacement, and individual and social trauma resulting from state-perpetrated violence'. The processes involved echo Herman's (1997) description of chronic trauma as an intimate dynamic, causing injury to urban inhabitants not from outside the city but from within, often in collusion with their ostensible protectors. Wounding is spatially and temporally dynamic, working both metonymically (via social ecologies of place and loss of routines) and psychosocially (via residents' intimate relationships with the city). Till draws on Fullilove's (2004) concept of 'root shock', an ecological metaphor describing people's traumatic stress reaction to neighbourhood displacement and the subsequent loss of memories, routines and

attachments. Politically mediated, these traumas are less visible and more discriminatory in their impacts, along similar lines to McKittrick's (2011) reframing of urbicide as anti-black geographical violence.

Shields' (2012:15) commentary on Till's paper pushes us to think about what PTSD at the urban scale might mean for urban analysis: 'if we think about trauma as both stress and wound, we recover a sense of materiality and embodiment as well as its virtual, less tangible but nonetheless real qualities'. Such a focus characterises feminist and critical race scholarship on trauma. For example, Akbar's (2017) recent account of urban trauma in the US is underpinned by recognition of racist oppression, linking the trauma of the historical condition of slavery directly to its contemporary reiteration. Even without PTSD as a defined clinical disorder, many members of communities of colour experience urban trauma, as a more dispersed psychological state reflecting contemporary urban conditions of poverty, poor housing and violence.

While largely situated in racialized urban neighbourhoods of North America, this second approach to urban trauma has resonance for other places, including the post-industrial village in northern England that I now move on to discuss. Like Nixon's slow violence, these concepts of shock, wounding and trauma draw on postcolonial theory, calling for antidotes to Western urban models that prioritise capital and view residents only as victims (Till 2012). The following case study of urban trauma and slow violence forefronts class oppression, given the history of relations between capitalism and labour in this region and, as Hodkinson and Robbins (2013) put it, that contemporary UK housing policy manifests as a form of class war. The story of chronic urban trauma that is told here is only one possible narration of the messy realities of change in Horden. It is a narration that is intentionally historicised, grounded in thick empirical study, and reads events through the lenses provided by these feminist and postcolonial analyses of trauma.

Methodology

In a challenge to dominant theoretical practices in urban political economy, Kern and McLean (2017: 406) recently argued for 'less abstract, detached, colonial and masculinist modes of urban knowledge production'. The participatory, arts-based, feminist praxis that underpinned our study involved collaboration with local activists towards alternative futures for housing in the village. Creative and participatory place-based methods are valuable in

helping to elicit the intimate life of urban areas and their inhabitants, as well as providing a vehicle to represent and challenge the effects of slow violence and trauma. We began the three-year project in 2015, when five members of Horden Colliery Residents Association worked with me to generate initial research questions. These were investigated using participatory techniques with local owner-occupiers, tenants, landlords, community groups and schools, exploring the past, present, and possible futures for the housing. I conducted historical and documentary analysis, and throughout the research period attended meetings with a wide range of residents, Parish and County Councillors, police representatives and regeneration organizations. The folk band Ribbon Road and local photographer Carl Joyce joined the project as artists in residence in 2015-2016, and their representations of the village and the lives of its inhabitants helped to raise awareness of the worsening housing situation (see Heslop et al forthcoming). A further period of fieldwork using ethnography and interviews was carried out in 2017 to assess the impact of the auctions one year after they occurred (Pain et al 2017). The analysis in this paper draws largely on ethnographic evidence and the historical and documentary analysis.

Chronic urban trauma and housing disposal

The context to the slow violence described here is the growing North-South divide in wealth and living standards in the UK, manifest in differentiated housing markets and housing crises, with ex-industrial areas of North especially badly affected (Dorling 2014; Heslop and Ormerod forthcoming). A recent raft of national government housing policy measures has had the effect of concentrating housing security and wealth amongst places and people that are already advantaged, and compounding housing insecurity, poor housing conditions and fragmented communities amongst places and people already the most vulnerable (Minton 2017). Social (public) housing has a key position in the UK's housing crises. Since the 1980s this housing, built by local government for rent to low income families, has been systematically dismantled by national government; from the slow asset draining brought about by right-to-buy policies without any replacement provision for successive families in housing need, to recent moments of mass disposal under pressures of private capital-led development in cities (Goetz 2016; Murie 2016). While more attention has been paid to social housing disposal ahead of gentrification of working class neighbourhoods (Elmer and Dening 2016; Minton 2017), the story of social housing in Horden is distinctively different.

The social housing is in the 'Numbered Streets' area of Horden, originally fourteen terraces in the village centre built to house miners, then transferred to a Housing Association for a reputed £1 per house to ensure its management after the 1987 pit closure. The winter of 2015-16 saw the sudden sale of 159 social housing properties at snap auctions that were held in the city of Newcastle, nearby, and in London, at the other end of the country. Following decades of managed decline, this was a moment of fast violence, an example of unfettered capitalist dynamics, but operating and sanctioned within the public and voluntary sectors (permission for disposal was granted by the national government's Homes and Communities Agency, and the Housing Association, as a former voluntary organization, was the key actor). Private capital has moved in swiftly, much of it purely speculative - a year later, most houses were still empty. Some new landlords are renting to welfare benefits claimants, which ensures them a steady income from the state but involves few obligations in relation to housing standards. The auctions have had the effect of draining assets out of the village, as most landlords are now based outside North East England, with a concentration in the wealthier South East (Pain et al 2017).

The rest of the paper analyses a number of dynamics in this process which, it is argued, can be understood in the context of historical processes of slow violence that result in and compound chronic urban trauma. Clearly, processes of dispossession are traumatic for residents because they lose homes or equity tied up in property, or are unable to move out, and, as communities become more divided, because of indirect but nonetheless impactful changes to sense of place and identity (Fullilove 2004; van der Graaf 2009). But as well as these individual effects of neighbourhood change that residents report, I suggest that collective chronic trauma can be identified within the neighbourhood, its history, its changing materiality and its representation. Chronic urban trauma, with its specific sets of temporalities and spatialities, becomes hard-wired in particular places.

Traumatic temporalities

> 'There was an acute sense of loss in places in which coalmines closed after decades of existence. This was typically accompanied by a period of grieving as people in these places tried to come to terms with the manifold implications of the precipitate ending of the economic raison d'être of their place. While there was some recognition of the economic consequences of decline, there was much less acknowledgement of, and sensitivity to, the cultural and psychological dimensions of sudden closure.'

(Bennett et al 2001:4)

The magnitude of slow violence rests upon its temporal and spatial dispersion (Nixon 2011). Chronic urban trauma is, by definition, built up over the long term. This results from two processes. First, there is a delay in the manifestation of the full effects of past violence. Every type of trauma displays an unpredictable non-linear trajectory, characterised by temporal dysphoria; time is warped, it moves both fast and slow, trauma can lay dormant for long periods, and the effects of earlier violence are reiterated most sharply at certain points when memory is revisited (Caruth 2014). The timelag between the traumatic event and its reliving, termed 'afterwardsness' by Laplanche (1992), becomes part of the condition of life for the traumatised.

But second, and characteristic of many examples of chronic trauma, the violence or its threat is often still present. Nixon (2011: 8) describes how 'ongoing intergenerational slow violence… (inflicted by, say, unexploded land mines or carcinogens from an arms dump) may continue hostilities by other means'. This is a significant divergence from the Freudian model of a single-event of fast violence that retraumatises through returning memory alone. In urban areas, the violences that cause trauma may vary over time, in form, perpetrator and scale; but they are interwoven as a complex of slow violence that converges in the poorest places. Today in Horden the violences of post-industrialism are layered up, concentrated in the central area of the Numbered Streets. Some forms of harm result directly from the coalmine closures, such as higher rates of poverty, unemployment, disability and ill-health amongst ex-miners and their families, while others affect people who move into the Streets often because of a lack of other options. Horden as a whole has twice the rate of crime and three times the rate of anti-social behaviour as England as a whole (Coalfields Regeneration Trust 2015). The Residents Association and local police receive frequent reports of vandalism and interpersonal violence in the Numbered Streets, and fear among the residents we spoke to has risen noticeably since the housing auctions, so that 'hot conflict' and the effects of slow violence converge together (George 2014).

The trauma created by slow violence not only oscillates over time, but becomes magnified where the source of violence continues and proliferates; trauma becomes, in turn, a powerful force sustaining the effects of violence. Echoing Herman's (1997) powerful description of the dynamics of abuse that involves long-term captivity, housing dispossession traumatises

where those affected are still trapped in place, and an ongoing relationship with the perpetrator is hard to escape. For example, in Cahill et al's (2016) study of Bushwick, New York, the earlier brutality of neighbourhood clearances has continuities with contemporary gentrification, closely connected to the aggressive policing of young black men who remain in the area.

In our study area, a seemingly singular event of urban change took place in 2015-16: the sudden mass disposal of social housing on the open market at a number of rapidly-organised auctions. While widely condemned sales have occurred elsewhere in the UK (Minton 2012; Murie 2016), those in Horden are the culmination of a longer and very particular story of dispossession. For a century, social housing has provided vital support for geographical working class communities, and offered some protection against the social shock of displacement that often follows industrial decline. In Horden, the sale has historical continuities with the state's abandonment of the coalmining industry, experienced as a major material dispossession as well as being notorious for physical brutality against striking miners on the picket line. The diffusing slow violence of the closures that followed was repeated in subsequent waves of welfare reform and disinvestment in public services. These have not fallen evenly, but affect the same places most sharply; since 2008, UK austerity has been most severe in the North East's ex-industrial areas (VONNE 2013). As Laurie and Shaw (2018) argue, violence is constituted by far more than the actions of individuals - it may comprise the conditions that bring subjects into being; and Herman (1997) is clear that chronic trauma from intimate abuse is enabled by systems of others who stand by in judgment or fail to intervene.

Central to these processes, at different scales, is psychological injury. As Sherman (2015) observes from her work with war veterans, where there is a sense of moral injury, trauma is longer lasting and more destructive than where it arises from physical suffering alone. For Herman (1997), psychological abuse, mindgames and doublethink instigated by perpetrators not only compound trauma from intimate abuse, but are central to the development of complex PTSD. Collective trauma following colonization may also be deepened where there is a sense of deception, seduction or complicity with the oppressor (Mbembe 2010). In Horden, as in other UK coalmining areas, a version of this dynamic played out on a much smaller scale up to the 1980s, and the subsequent years of managed decline of social housing has strong continuities with this earlier abandonment. Echoes of the 1987 coalmine closure

documented in Beynon et al (1990) are present in the nature of the housing disposal, and the manner in which it was executed without consultation or even information to residents. The subterfuge by the National Coal Board during the strikes (see Beynon et al 1990) and more recently by the Housing Association has a number of similarities. Both involved misinformation about what was to happen and when and false promises to the community; in the 1980s, that nearby coalmines were to be kept open so that jobs could be transferred, and in 2010 that £7 million would be spent renovating properties. In the end, the coalmine closure and housing sales were unannounced, rapid and brutal. The details of the operationalisation of dispossession reveal a gradual dismantling not just of the material fabric of previously publicly-owned assets (Pain et al 2016), but the foundation of a community's belonging and way of life (Fullilove 2005; Till 2012).

The state is able to pursue tactics of psychological violence with impunity, not only because these tactics can remain shrouded in invisibility despite continual activist struggles to bring them to light (Nixon 2011), but because disrespect toward these same communities, and the premise of their disposability, is already firmly entrenched (McKenzie 2015). Constituted decades ago by uncompromising late-Victorian industrial capitalism, workers and jobs were viewed as disposable as the properties they lived in. Bright (2016) shows how the 1980s miners' strikes and coalmine closures provides an affective context for the precarity of young people's lives in South Yorkshire and Derbyshire former mining villages. Coalmining and its bitter end both hamper young people's opportunities and, at moments of resurgence, provide some frameworks for resistance. As I have outlined, social violence is not simply a past memory, and recovery is challenging when violent conditions and impacts continue unchecked (see Laurie and Shaw 2018). Retraumatisation is a continued risk as new but related waves of violence reoccur, and this retraumatisation becomes integral to sustaining slow violence.

Ecologies of the aftermath

How can we understand this chronic trauma as specifically urban as well as social in nature? Many theories of trauma understand that it has distinct spatialities. Freudian analysis conceives of trauma as arising from a piercing wound that comes from outside, placing the subject in a topographical relationship with a strange other (Freud 1954). Feminist and postcolonial analysts identify a similar relation but, as we have outlined, at a larger scale and within a complex of power relations that are both structural and intimate; here trauma is

'collective, spatial, and material (instead of individual, temporal and linguistic)' (Rothberg 2008: 228). Recent literatures on the geographies of trauma recognise various ways in which it is spatialized (Coddington and Micieli-Voutsinas 2017). Here, I describe the symbiotic relationship that chronic urban trauma has with place, given that places are often the target of slow violence. Chronic urban trauma may be thought of not only as embodied in place but as, in some ways, hard-wired, just as traumatic memories become wired into bodily memory (van der Kolk 2015). This is not to suggest either that places become irrevocably stuck, that retraumatisation is inevitable, or that places are accountable for the reiteration of damage. The emplacement of trauma can facilitate retraumatisation, but equally it can potentially shift.

In his discussion of 'ecologies of the aftermath', Nixon (2011) describes the downwinding of the environmental effects of armed conflict that may lie dormant for years, effecting a continuation of the initial violence much later. Biological contamination from warfare gradually diffuses through time and space, through bodies and ecosystems, eventually 'convert[ing] the earth into a biological weapon that threatens biology itself' (Nixon 2011: 232). Such effects are dispersed, invisible, and may travel far beyond the original targets, so that 'the difficulty of narrating temporal duration is compounded by the difficulty of narrating physical scale' (216). We can apply this idea of holding-harm-in-place to state housing policies and their effects on the urban environments and communities that are often tied to them. Some of Horden's social housing has been occupied by tenants who have lived there for decades, while in other houses people regularly move in and out, and a good proportion have lain empty for years. Chronic urban trauma has a material embodiment, held in place even when people who witness earlier harmful events have moved on.

We saw many instances of retraumatisation effected in this way. The material fabric of properties in the Numbered Streets has been the focus of wrangles between the Residents Association, the County Council and the Housing Association for many years. The ecologies of the aftermath of the triad of coalmine closures, housing mismanagement and austerity centre on deteriorating and unhealthy housing that has a rebounding effect on the community's health, wellbeing and ability to thrive. Common problems of damp and decay are made worse by a persistent failure of housing management to conduct timely repairs. Rubbish and used needles in yards and back lanes behind the houses accumulate from illegal fly-tipping and drug use, encouraging rat infestations that are difficult to eliminate. The theft of roof tiles, central heating boilers and pipework from empty properties, arson and other fire

risks as teenagers using empty properties light fires to stay warm, and asbestos that has either not been removed from tenanted properties in a safe way or not removed at all, are all reported by tenants in the Numbered Streets.

These deteriorating, proliferating ecologies are essential to the process of managed decline; rubbish that attract rats and keeps piling up however many times it is cleared, a leaking roof that causes mould to grow in the baby's bedroom, fears of fires starting in empty properties through the partition wall – these are amongst the reasons for tenants moving out, and the failure to address them either before or afterwards meant that empty properties were seldom successfully re-let. There has been no clearance of buildings, redevelopment or gentrification in the Numbered Streets, simply this decades-long, concealed process of allowed decline followed by the swift moment of sale at auction. Yet the process has strong resonance with urban trauma described in neighbourhoods of North American cities (Cahill et al 2016; Fullilove 2004; Kern 2015; Till 2012). Similarly, Anguelovski (2013) describes trauma in Boston, Barcelona and Havana arising from multiple sources: historical neighbourhood annihilation, racist violence, the conflict zones that newcomers have left behind, and current conditions of poverty, crime and environmental dispossession. The structure of feeling these invoke is summed up by the activists Anguelovski spoke to as ongoing urban warfare. We may think of places, then, as acquiring capacities to (re)traumatise; their fabric, in this case 14 streets of terraced housing, is not simply the backdrop. Urban as well as emotional ecologies carry and compound trauma so long as slow violence is unchecked.

The moral ecologies of places also work to enable this. Stigma, labelling, responsibilization and internalization are central to the psychology of trauma (Herman 1997). Survivors of intimate trauma have historically been viewed by the psychiatric profession as culpable and even deserving (Stark 2007): the disempowering narrative of 'learned helplessness' fails to reflect the reality of living with violence and erases their own activism (Herman 1997; Pain 2014). A related narrative can be seen in external perceptions of the many post-industrial places in the UK where a higher proportion of residents, whether in work or workless, receive state benefits. There is a long history of marginalised neighbourhoods being blamed and people seen as passive, and if not wholly responsible for their situation then certainly at fault for not escaping it. Mining communities in particular are imagined to be stuck in the past, unable to let go of historical injustices (Strangleman et al 1999). Such culpability smooths the path towards disposability. In intimate violence, the labelling of victims as to blame for their

situation retraumatises (Stark 2007): external perceptions accentuate chronic trauma, and help sustain the effects of slow violence. Nixon (2011) argues that forgetting violent events enables slow violence; amnesia may take hold in gentrified communities, as memory is dislodged and signs of violence erased (Kern 2016). In contrast, in the disregarded communities of North East England, histories of dispossession are remembered and commemorated, for example in the annual Durham Miner's Gala, but this is constituted by those outside as further evidence of being stuck in the past and unable to let go. As I have outlined, the trauma of coalmine closures has remained, not because of mining communities' misty-eyed romanticism and inability to move forward - a common stereotype in the UK - but because of repeated waves of (slow) violence that accentuate the poverty trap.

Rebuilding: memory as counter-traumatic

Memory is not only traumatic, nor are waves of re-traumatisation inevitable for historically traumatised places. Trauma's hard-wiring in the brain and body can be treated (van der Kolk 2015). Trauma in place also remains mobile - gathering pace and receding, spreading contagiously (Coddington 2017) while also being managed and, to differing degrees, overcome. Sites of trauma are always in flux, the connection between trauma and place changing as time moves on (Coddington and Micieli-Voutsinas 2017; Trigg 2009). Indeed, traumatic memory centred on place may form the basis for resistance and rebuilding (see also Anguelovski 2013) as we witnessed in Horden; many residents are engaged in self- and community-help and practices of care.

The term 'rebuilding' rather than 'recovery' from trauma signals that this is never a linear or complete process (Tamas 2011). Edkins (2003) underlines the state's interest in the production of linear narratives of recovery, identifying many instances where the state has appeared to be a protector while also being a perpetrator of violence. The responsibilisation of those who are seen to be unwilling or unable to recover from trauma is central to this technique across intimate, colonial, capitalist and neoliberal violences. Herman's (1997) four stages of recovery from chronic trauma - achieving safety, practicing remembrance and mourning, reconnecting to the outside world, and recognition of the commonality of suffering – are, as I have suggested, blocked rather than enabled by state responses to the loss of coalfield industries in the UK. For Herman, moving on from chronic trauma requires both breaking silence about violent events with collective testimony and an ecosystem that fosters recovery, drawing strength from wider social support.

The housing in the Numbered Streets holds fond memories for many older people who live there or nearby. They regard it with affection, despite feeling the effects of the community's decline the hardest. The emotional networks that are important to healthy places are still present decades after the coalmine closures. The song lyrics 'be there for me' at the beginning of this paper were written to reflect the mutual care and solidarity witnessed by our research team (see Heslop et al forthcoming). Welfare reform and severe financial cuts to Local Authority budgets and the voluntary sector have a substantially greater impact in former mining communities than the UK as a whole, but many are still characterised by 'a strong community spirit and a dense network of family and social ties' (Foden et al 2014: 28). This is itself a legacy of miners' earlier voluntarism that provided the community with essential services and leisure facilities when mining villages were first established in County Durham. Voluntarism remains strong in Horden and surrounding mining villages: the Residents Association run by a couple in their seventies which campaigns for better conditions in the tenanted properties of the Numbered Streets; the volunteer-run youth club, community centre, and the Heritage Centre which opened in 2009; the Hub House which was established in the Numbered Streets in 2017 and has a team of volunteers working locally; the events organised around the unveiling of the statue of 'the Marra' in 2016 and annual participation in the Miner's Gala are just some examples.

As Shields reminds us, 'trauma can involve the actualization of unexpected aspects and capacities of places, people and communities' (2012:15), as an active and dynamic condition rather than a static state on replay. While it is important not to romanticise or distract from the severity of the problems the village is dealing with, the collective ethics of care described by many residents stands in stark contrast to external depictions of helplessness and fixity. For Till (2016: 5), the antidote to urban wounding is provided by 'significant ethical and political practices that may work to constitute more democratic urban realms', while Anguelovski (2013) suggests that funding for environmental revitalization should focus on psychological dimensions, so that opportunities to remake place not only rebuild communal identity but create space for healing. Several of the examples above in Horden are part of this effort, involving residents working imaginatively and creatively to secure sparse funding.

Conclusion

This paper has introduced the concept of chronic urban trauma to provide a means of understanding the long term effects of slow violence and repeated damage done to certain places. Chronic urban trauma specifically describes the psychological damage that historical and contemporary violences not only create alongside physical harm, but that they depend on to be sustained and repeated. It centres on a critical account of power relations in trauma, emphasises the close connections between intimate and collective experience, involves a distinct set of temporalities, and identifies social politics as central to causality, experience, treatment and rebuilding. Chronic trauma thus fits well with the idea of slow violence which also arises from continuous misuse of structural power and has cumulative effects. Trauma helps in understanding the place-based as well as temporal and aspects of slow violence: how cycles of fast and slow violence continue to be practised and legitimated in specific locales.

This account emphasises the emotional and intimate realms as fundamental to processes of urban dispossession, dynamics that are not side effects of urban processes on people but at the heart of these processes. It is founded in feminist and postcolonial theories that critique the workings of power within cities, and emphasize the close connections between intimate and collective experience. Taking a different standpoint to recent writing on post-traumatic urbanism, this analysis of trauma attends to its historical, political, material and emotional dimensions, identified in the case of social housing dispossession in North East England. In particular, I have suggested, trauma becomes hard-wired in particular places which acquire the capacity to re-traumatise, so that the city, the neighbourhood and the street, as well as individual bodies, might be understood as sites that hold chronic trauma. However, the emplacement of trauma can equally shift, and this framing holds possibilities for healing and rebuilding. Here, rather than a concern with macro level urban design offering solutions, the local ground-up alternatives and care already in place are emphasised. The support that these alternatives require is, however, completely inconsistent with austerity and the indiscriminate undermining of voluntarism, both imposed by the UK national government, that have damaged North East England more than other regions over the last decade.

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